

PZ

8

S257

Vi

FT MEADE
GenColl

ENCHANTED LIBRARY

FOR YOUNG FOLKS



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. Copyright No.

Shelf

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



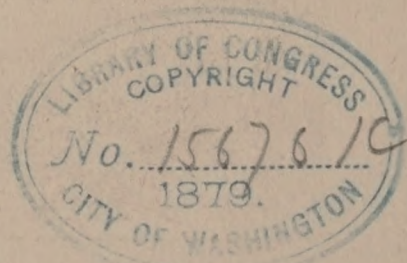
THE MARCH OF THE PEACOCKS,

A VISIT TO
EL-FAY-GNO-LAND.

BY
MRS. M. M. ^{above} SANFORD.

AUTHOR OF "BERRISFORD."

ILLUSTRATED.



NEW YORK.
THE AUTHORS' PUBLISHING COMPANY,
BOND STREET.

[1879].

π

PZ8
.S 257
Yi

Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1879, by
THE AUTHORS' PUBLISHING COMPANY,
In the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

44-02-44

TO
THE LITTLE BOYS AND GIRLS,

IN EVERY LAND,

THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY,

M. MALONIA [RAY] SANFORD.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
CHAPTER I.	
THE LATCH STRING.....	9
CHAPTER II.	
THE HOME OF SANTA AND KRECHE.....	21
CHAPTER III.	
SANTA AND KRECHE.....	33
CHAPTER IV.	
THE YEAR'S LABOR.....	47
CHAPTER V.	
SANTA TELLS OF HIS COURTSHIP.....	57
CHAPTER VI.	
SANTA AND KRECHE'S HOUR OF GLADNESS.....	65
CHAPTER VII.	
THE VAGARIES OF SANTA AND KRECHE.....	73
CHAPTER VIII.	
THE RECONCILIATION.....	81
CHAPTER IX.	
LAUGH-E-OO AND VIOLETTE.....	89
CHAPTER X.	
THE SLEEPERS AWAKE.....	101

FULL PAGE
ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
THE MARCH OF THE PEACOCKS.....	2
MARRIAGE OF HUGE BUMBLE BEE AND TINY WHITE MOUSE BY GAFFER GRASS HOPPER.....	20
CUPID AND CAMPASPE PLAYING CARDS FOR KISSES.....	56
THE REINDEER QUADRILLE.....	64
AGAG, THE ELF-KING, PREPARING TO HUNT FOR THE WEDDING RING.....	80
LAUGH-E-OO GOES WITH A RING TO COURT VIOLETTE.....	90
SANTA LEAVING EL-FAY-GNO-LAND ON HIS CHRISTMAS JOURNEY.....	100



EL-FAY-GNO-LAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE LATCH-STRING.

“ YET all these were when no man did them know,
Yet have from wisest ages hidden been,
And later times things more unknown shall show.

Why then should witless man so much misween
That nothing is but that which he hath seen ?

What, if within the moon's fair shining sphere,
What, if in every other star unseen,

Of other worlds he happily should hear ?

He wonder would much more ; yet such to some appear.”

A STEEP, rocky mountain. Its top is crowned with tall, majestic pines and hemlocks, around which sweep storms and whirlwinds, creating a melody like the low, deep tones of a cathedral organ ; ice and snow glistening cold and white ; the whole, at once, majestic and grand. Its front is a mass of huge, grey boulders, towering and seemingly inaccessible.

Its foot is carpeted with the softest and richest of yellow and red mosses, which are bright with lichens, and dotted with tall, feathery, nodding ferns, fairy-like maiden-hair, large, waxy indian-pipe and sweet-scented vines; while the country around is gay with soft, green grass, summer flowers and the songs of fluttering birds.

Within the very bowels of this mountain is the home of those dear old friends of every child in the land—Santa Claus and his wife, Kreche Kindly.

Methinks I hear some one ask, Where is this wonderful mountain?

My little friend, I cannot tell you.

Were I to do so, in your great joy you would tell the world. Pilgrims would flock to it from every zone; and thus, that desirable quiet of Santa's household would be destroyed. His time and that of his wife would be taken up in entertaining guests, and the bountiful Christmas of to-day would give place to a mock feast, where the table is spread with dishes of wood, but never a thing upon them.

A few, however, who have been touched by the wonderful "Ointment of Invisibility," have visited this spot one day in a hundred years, and touched

the Latch-String which is the "*open sesame*" through the door of that old grey mountain's side.

One morning I felt that I had been touched with this wonderful "ointment." I hardly waited to make a few hasty preparations for travelling, so great was my eagerness to be on my way o'er land and sea. The usually fast rail and steamer seemed to me like snail coaches; but on—on—I went through jungles and morass, never tiring, always wakeful, until the day before Christmas, I found myself standing in the enchanted place before the mountain.

I at once began my search for the Latch-string which, I had been given to understand, would this day be left hanging out.

Back and forth before those grey boulders I walked, straining my eyes and looking everywhere for that all important "string."

What will it be like? A weather-beaten rope, think?

No, no, I answered myself. It is only once in many years that it is hung out. It could never get weather-beaten!

Will it be a new hemp cord?

No, it cannot be that!

That would excite too much curiosity. It was certain that I need not look for either rope or string.

Something which I fancied was like a brown door-knob struck my sight.

That must be it! The times have changed, I thought. People no longer use a latch with a string, but door-knobs instead. How am I to reach it? Dear! dear! it seems a half a mile away!

Calling wit to my aid, I devised a ladder of the running vines, then laboriously climbed up—up—ever keeping an eye on that mysterious knob. I reached it. I grasped it with both hands. I gave one stout pull.

Did a door fly open?

No; I met only with a severe disappointment!

It was but a projecting part of the grey boulder.

Down—down—I carefully made my way. Oh! so glad to feel my feet once more on the soft red moss, and to smell the sweets of the summer flowers.

I must look still further. What *will* the Latch-string be like? I kept asking myself.

One thing I particularly noticed. A long spray of continuous flowers and buds, and one seeming to spring from the solid rock itself, had been dancing

up and down, hither and thither in the soft breezes, now before me, brushing my hair into my eyes, now saucily hitting my cheek and emitting a perfume like the oil of pansies and the attar of roses combined, until my senses reeled with the intoxicating play of its motion and odor.

At last, after thinking that I could bear it no longer, I exclaimed, "Peste! keep still! I believe I am both dazzled and drunk with your beauty!"

As it playfully waved to and fro in the gentle breeze, it saucily stopped before my face and hung motionless.

Had I found the Latch-string?

My hands trembled with a delighted excitement as I carefully grasped this floral cord.

Should I pull? Would it prove the "open sesame"? Was there about to be spread before me a fairy world?

I hardly dare.

However, as I took a sniff of the crushed flowers my courage rose. Then, too, my little friends would never forgive me if my cowardice were to conquer!

I pulled—gently at first—a little harder—harder still—harder—harder—oh! the vine—the floral cord

—snapped and fell at my feet and formed a beautiful wreath, in the centre of which I found myself standing.

Alas ! this was not the Latch-string !

I began to think that Santa was not very kind.

Again I cast my eyes upward and let them scan the mountain side. Simply standing and gazing at this or that would never accomplish the work which I had undertaken ; I must strive with brain and hand if I expected to ever succeed in gaining an entrance.

A dark, irregularly shaped square among the boulders was next looked at with interest.

Could that be a door ?

Possibly ! for a door of some sort there must be.

Again I climbed, carefully working my way, holding myself steady by means of cracks and crevices ; now making progress by boldly walking a step or two upon some rocky, moss-grown shelf ; now falling back and losing as much as I had previously gained, until, nearly overcome with fatigue and despair, I attained a strong foothold in front of the darkly outlined boulder.

Examining it carefully, I saw what I was sure were hinges, and spots also which I took to be nails or bolts.

"Ha! ha!" I laughed; "I am right at last!"

"Ha! ha-a-a!" came from behind me. "Ha! ha-a-a-a!" came from my right. "Ha! ha-a-a-a-a!" came from my left. "Ha! ha-a-a-a-a-a-a!" came from above me.

Hastily I looked around. No one was in sight. What did it mean? What was I to do? Should I knock?

At first the idea seemed to be simply ridiculous—to knock with my womanly knuckles upon that solid block of stone!

But, then, why not knock? Surely there must be some way to let Santa know that at his invitation I had arrived at the foot of the mountain, and was waiting to pay my invisible respects to him and Kreche, his wife.

So thinking, I knocked and waited; knocked and listened to hear some coming step or voice bidding me enter; moved along and knocked in different places; tried different kinds of knocks; some with one knuckle sharply pointed, many with four, and, growing impatiently bold, showered a succession of knocks with my doubled fists, until I came to the conclusion that knocking of every sort would never

gain an entrance through that provokingly obdurate mountain side.

I might as well retrace my winding way, and once more standing on terra-firma, cogitate at length upon some other plan and move.

To go back to my home without having seen Santa and Kreche, I never, never, never would !

Again I worked my perilous way down, and seating myself on a mossy knoll, cooled my heated feet by rubbing them on the soft, green grass.

I also took a draught from a bubbling spring, gathered and ate some delicious strawberries which were growing near, and, after wiping the perspiration from my face, felt better in body, although dreadfully anxious still in mind.

I had had a mission given me and would perform it at any cost !

My spirit, after this last determination, rose ; and changing my seat to one more favorable, I took a calm survey of the face of the boulders.

Surely, I thought, my eyes caught the wave of a tent flap ?

But where—*where* ?

Who knew whether Santa's home had, or had not, a pavilion entrance ?

My eyes now crossed and recrossed the seamed, jagged boulders until, in their tire, I saw columns and pillars, Ionic and Corinthian, porticos wide and lofty, porticos low and narrow, porticos vine-clad and naked ; everything in a jumble and nothing plain.

Finally, to my great relief, these cleared away like mist before the sun, and there, bold, majestic and impenetrable as ever, stood the grey mountain.

H'm ! H'm ! What next ?

I shut my eyes and tried to think.

Perhaps Santa had been playing me a trick and really had no home to invite me to !

No ! I would not think *that* of him !

Had I not always found that the fruit which grew highest upon the tree and was the most difficult to obtain, was ever the sweetest and most juicy when reached ?

So my enjoyment of the sights which I should find in Santa's abode would be increased in proportion to the barriers which, found in my way, I persisted in overcoming !

Again I set my eyes to work.

Was not that a dimly outlined face which I now saw ?

In imagination the surface of the boulders was now covered with faces.

Some were huge and grotesque, with monstrous staring eyes, others were round, laughing and merry, many were beautiful, but all were elfish.

Ha! there was one with a pipe! Santa has ever been described as a continual smoker! Let me catch another glance of *that* one face! The one which held an amber pipe between its laughing lips!

Ah! that identical one, that very one, *the* one had disappeared.

How provoking! Would it reappear?

Mouths laughed and twitched and drew merrily, eyes beamed and knowingly twinkled at me in my perplexity, and then, all disappeared as had the porticos and pillars.

Dear! dear!

Now I saw innumerable hands.

They beckoned, waved, and threw me kisses, outlined symbolical figures, and played at pranks generally.

Now I beheld dancing feet.

They whirled and waltzed and shuffled, cut the gayest of antics, and then, like all the rest, disappeared in

turn, and left the cold, grey boulders to stand out in bold relief.

I covered my tired eyes with my hand. The lids seemed gently pressed down. My limbs relaxed their stiffness. I felt that I was being gently borne upward. A tinkling of silver bells fell upon my ears. A soft wand was placed in my hand which instantly gave a spasmodic motion.

My little friends, I NOW HELD THE LATCH-STRING !





MARRIAGE OF HUGE BUMBLE BEE AND TINY WHITE MOUSE BY GAFFER

GRASS HOPPER,

Chap. II.



CHAPTER II.

THE HOME OF SANTA AND KRECHE.

“ Here be a woods as green
As any, air likewise as fresh and sweet
As where smooth Zephyrus plays on the fleet
Face of the curled stream, with flow'rs as many
As the young spring gives, and as choice as any ;
Here by all new delights, cool streams and wells,
Arbors o'ergrown with woodbine, caves and dells ;
Chase where thou wilt, while I sit by and sing,
Or gather rushes to make many a ring.”

YES, I held the Latch-string !

I knew it by the strange thrill which shot through hand and arm.

Suddenly and noiselessly a wide, high door flew open. Invisible hands shoved me through it. The door as noiselessly and suddenly closed behind me. I knew that, for a time, I had left the outer world and was in the midst of the truly wonderful.

And another thing I knew, and hoped I should not forget. That it was for the benefit of the little girls and boys whom Santa and Kreche love so well, that I was permitted to make this visit.

Can you believe that I was any other than all eyes and ears to what I was going to see and hear?

No; I am sure not.

Ah! but Santa and Kreche little thought of all that I was to see and hear that day. If they had, or, if they had had the faintest dream of how powerfully the "ointment" was working upon me, or, how my every faculty was almost painfully alert to my surroundings, or, of my determination to leave nothing unobserved nor undescribed on my return, 'tis doubtful if I had received the honor of an invitation to their eyric abode; and if it is a breach of politeness on my part—this recording *all* that I heard or saw in that old mountain home—I humbly beg Santa and Kreche's pardon.

As I before said, the door quietly closed behind me.

Before me stretched a high, irregular hall that seemed to be miles in length and breadth.

The arched roof, if it were a roof, was spangled with stars that glittered and twinkled in their frosty blue setting, while the silvery moon hung her crescent-horn and moved among them like the queen she is.

The vast space which was stretched before me, and

which at first seemed to my newly set eyes like a whole country in itself, was broken into shady groves of tall, feathery palms which waved and gracefully swayed to and fro in the soft breeze; flowering locusts which towered up toward the star-spangled roof, and formed brown pillars supporting green arches; hanging gardens—suspended from, I couldn't see where—but which were rank with mammoth roses, oleanders, waxy lilies, whose nearly intoxicating perfumes stole upon me in wafts. These were flanked upon every side by clusters of orange and lemon trees, bananas; and the odd looking cocoanut, so tall and branchless that I fell to wondering how the fruit from them was ever obtained.

When lo! up among the top clusters I spied a little brown image, and as I caught the twinkle of his sharp eyes, I knew that he had been placed there to cast the fruit down. What was still more singular—as it combined the Orient with the Occident, autumn with spring, and summer with winter—were the leafless trunks of our own loved butternut, chestnut and walnut, while bags and bags of their ripe nuts were piled beneath them.

A shimmer of silvery light caught my eye. Soon

a cool spray from balm-scented fountains regaled my senses, and I felt myself rapidly recovering from the fatigue attendant upon my swift and lengthy journey.

Seating myself for a moment in an arbor of woodbine, I let my eyes run over the little chattering brooks in which pretty speckled trout were leaping, over the entrances to shady dells and caves, over the sparkling cascades which were arched by evergreens, and the more tiny waterfalls which poured over clean white rocks, and around which invisible water-sprites must have been playing at hide and seek, there was such a faint splashing and ruffling of the surface of the curling stream.

I soon learned that the water-sprites were having a gala day.

Pretty rings of foam came whirling to the light, and then falling upon the water, floated indolently away—away—and with such graceful motions that I knew them to be foam-crowns on the heads of maiden-sprites.

These were closely followed by curled and parti-colored maple leaves, and in them were seated gay little sprite queens, who, with their attendants, were

being floated down the stream to reign at a yearly sprite-feast to which came the sprites from every water.

Listening, I heard them singing in a faint murmuring cadence like the mellowing ripple of a sea-shell:

“Come one, come all, and trim your sails,
To float the bonniest queen that hails
From silvered streams and sun-kissed waves,
And banks of foam and coral caves;
Let every water-sprite draw nigh,
And change to mist her faintest sigh,
To sparkling foam her slightest glance,
Or at her wave of hand to dance
In measure light around her car,
On golden beam of sun-lit air.
Come one, come all, and prostrate fall
Before this bonniest queen of all.”

I gathered that their destination was a lofty, roomy, hall-like sea-shell which had been stranded on a sandy beach. There they were to dance on a floor of pearls, and feast from dishes of carved coral on the tender liver of a very young sea-calf. After which they were to form themselves into a sprite-flotilla and

await the pleasure of Santa and Kreche, who might, in some indescribable way, need their services.

Leaving these, my eyes sought the lovely, placid lakes whose smooth surfaces caught and reflected the frosty blur of the sky, the glitter of the stars, and the calm, dignified crescent shape of the swinging moon.

The banks were fringed with low willows which laved their tips in the clear waters, while they formed a border of greyish green to these immense reflecting mirrors.

Many of these lakes were dotted with gay little boats, in which I at once concluded Santa and Kreche refreshed themselves when wearied, by taking sails.

In the centre of two or three of these quiet little bodies of water, rose grottoes of white marble. I could perceive, even at my distance, that their floors were paved with smooth, white malachite stones, while the seats were huge rose-tinted conch shells, and twined around them and hanging in wreaths was that peculiar pale green, long-sprayed sea-moss which is so soft and velvety to the touch.

Pendant from the white arches were long stalactites which threw off prismatic colors and formed such

pretty shafts of light that I again fell to wondering if there were mermaids in those waters, and if they ever come up from their coral beds; and—sitting in those moss-wreathed conch-shell chairs—by the lovely prismatic light of the moon-kissed stalactites, comb out their long, silky, beautiful hair, and, catching the moonbeams on their silvered mirrors, coquettishly try to throw their reflection on Santa, as he strolled on the quiet banks, and so coquette with, and bring him under their charmed influence, that they could playfully bind him with ropes of sea-weed, and drag him down to their sea-cave home.

On little rising knolls were the fairy rings.

I strayed toward them.

How often I had longed for this hour, and here it was!

Then, too, I had hoped to see a Fairy Queen lead out the dance.

Right here, however, disappointment was to be mine.

The dance was ended, and the queens lay resting within the scented coverlets of half-blown roses.

The "Maids of Honor," after feeding them on honey, ambrosia and nectar, had laid their queens'

beauteous heads on the yellow, seedy pillows, tucked the satin-petal coverlets down, drawn the tinted curtains close, and now stood on guard, that the over-fatigued, petite queens might enjoy, without being disturbed, a refreshing nap.

All this was whispered to me in faint murmurs, and so, after bending over the queen-laden roses as long as I dared, I reluctantly moved on.

Next, my roving, prying, spying eyes—for of course I had come to rove, and pry, and spy—took in the feasting ground of the Elves.

I knew it by the many bright fire-flies which were hovering over it in mid-air.

In the centre was a spring of pure, clear water, which bubbled, and boiled, and foamed, while its brink was hung with that long-sprayed sea-moss which was everywhere so abundant, and at the same time so prettily ornamenting, that I did not wonder at its frequent use.

The fine filament ends of this lovely plant lay on the surface of the uneasy water, which, by its bubbling motion, gave a quicksilver green tinge, and was wholly unlike anything that I had ever before seen.

Carelessly scattered around were halves and triangular pieces of brown nutshells, whose meats had been served by the Elves before their King.

Lying in heaps were untasted pomegranates and poppy seeds and heads of dead-ripe grain, while here and there were broken elf-arrowheads and shattered elf-lances, telling of the warlike spirit of the Elf-king, and that he had been drilling his subjects in the art of war, or that they had been holding tournaments and mimic battles before him, and for his especial amusement.

Now, it is a Germanic custom to gather these arrowheads and broken lances wherever they are found, and wear them upon the breast as a talismanic protection against poison, evil spirits, accidents, and many other unpleasant things; but I dare not even lift them, for I had been invited to see and hear, not touch.

I walked along and fell into a strange procession. It was composed wholly of peacocks. A most majestic moving bird led the van. It was very lengthy, and formed such an array of moving color that I was fairly dazzled with its iridescent splendor.

I wondered greatly what part these birds had to

perform. Was Santa and Kreche so dainty in appetite as to feed upon peacocks' tongues?

Before I left, however, I learned their use.

Next, I fell among a motley company which appeared to be marching in couples, and from all directions, to one centre.

Tiniest humming-birds, wing and wing; chirping crickets and katydids, fireflies and devils-darning-needles, cock-chaffers and beetles, pair and pair; were preceding me, with butterflies hovering everywhere.

I soon learned that Squire Huge Bumble Bee, of Hive Grove, had been that morning married by Gaffer Grass Hopper to the lovely and chaste belle, Miss Tiny White Mouse; and these airy visitors were the invited guests to the wedding dinner which was being given at the residence of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Grey Mouse at Castle Tumble Down.

Ah, yes! I would consider myself invited and attend; but more as a reporter than a guest.

They came! They continued to come! I thought there would be no end!

The lovely Misses Miller in white velvet and grey; the numerous Butterfly family in their fullest dress; the Fireflies with their diamond ornaments;

the Beetles in their jet coats; the Ants, each tugging a kernel of grain; the Wasps in bodices of yellow satin; the Katydids in pea green; the Grass Hoppers in russet brown; the Lady Bugs in gold and maroon. I cannot tell you of all, only that they were there.

It was to be a garden party, and the guests were received under a witch-hazel bush.

The bride was dressed in a robe of ermine without the spots, and a mantle of red silk, which was tied around her neck and then thrown gracefully over her back.

Her long slender tail was modestly curled around her little feet, and her delicate paw was lovingly rested on Squire Huge Bumble Bee's shoulder.

Squire Bumble Bee himself was, as usual, very pompous; stood very erect, and with wings spread to show his fine evening suit of striped orange and black.

It was, at once, an unique and pretty sight.

The guests presented themselves in much order.

The Lady Bugs with timidity, the Grass Hoppers with hat in hand, the Flies in white-topped boots, the Horn Bugs drew white handkerchiefs from under their shiny coats; each seeming to feel that they must

honor the occasion by doing the best they knew how, and, if possible, by out-doing their neighbor in politeness, compliments and attentions to the bride.

The company and their congratulations were received in a modest, charming way, and then they were invited to the feast.

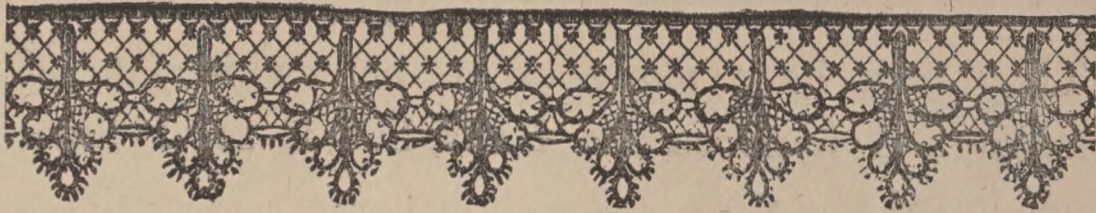
The table was a smooth, flat stone in an open glade.

The table-cloth was of the united petals of white water-lilies.

Golden acorn-cups were filled with the purest and clearest of honey. These were flanked by rose-leaf plates of slices of bee-bread; upon round white pebbles lay squares of pine apple-cheese, quarters of golden-sweet apples, bunches of luscious raisins, and many other viands, the nature of which I could not determine.

The guests, in their well-bred politeness, partook sparingly of these tempting dishes, and then, arm in arm, or wing and wing, made their adieus, and turned upon their homeward way.

I watched them out of sight, and then began to think within myself that it was time for me to turn my further attention to the personages of my story—Santa Claus and his dear old wife, Kreche Kindly.



CHAPTER III.

SANTA AND KRECHE.

SANTA.

“THOUGH I go bare, take ye no care,
I nothing am a-colde ;
I stuff my skin so full within
Of jolly good ale and olde,
No frost or snow, no wind I trow,
Can hurt me if I wolde,
I am so wrapte, and thoroughly lapte
In jolly good ale and olde.”

KRECHE.

“ Outward grace weak love beguiles—
She is Venus when she smiles,
But she is Juno when she walks,
And Minerva when she talks.”

YES, I had journeyed long and far to see this famous couple, who are known to some of my dear little readers as Santa Claus and Kreche Kindly, to others as Kriss and Krissy Kringle, to others yet as Saint and Saintess Nicholas.

They may have many other names in far off oriental and hyperborean lands, but if so, I have never heard them.

I had not long to look.

In the centre of this vast hall sat the wonderful pair.

Anxious to do my work of seeing well, and that nothing might escape my vision, I slowly drew toward them.

As I had expected, they were busily at work; and as they did not seem to be aware of my presence, I knew that the "Invisible Ointment" had also done its work.

This indifference to my presence, however, may have been only politeness on their part, thinking that I might feel embarrassed at finding myself in so strange a place and in so distinguished company; for over these scenes of which I am still to tell and have been telling, Santa and Kreche reigned as king and queen.

Many others from different climes, and who spoke in different tongues and who had been also touched with the "ointment," may have been present and standing beside me; but if so, we were all in the same state of invisibility to each other.

Well; I stood and looked upon Santa in wonder!

From the fact of his having a reputation of ascending and descending the tallest and narrowest of chimneys I had ever thought of him as a thin, feather-weight dwarf. And what a mistake!

Here he was a thick, jovial, well-fed old fellow with a round, merry face, bright blue eyes, long straight nose, handsome mouth and teeth, broad, high forehead, white hair falling over his collar in soft, large curls, and a long wavy white beard which fell down low upon his breast.

He wore a dressing-gown of a rich oriental pattern, which was lined with cherry satin and trimmed with bands of ermine, and which in itself told of his journeys in countries that were both cold and hot; while white Turkish pantaloons, red silk stockings and fur slippers completed his strange attire.

And this was Santa Claus!

What do you think of him?

Kreche showed her age more, perhaps, than did Santa.

She was tall, and broad, and dignified; but her Venus-like beauty was certainly on the wane.

In my younger days I had heard much that was

good of this same old Kreche. Of her extra loving care of motherless little children ; and that, if she did not appear to them in person, they were none the less excluded from her thoughts ; that she prompted and influenced those who had them in charge to be ever patient with their naughty ways, mindful of their many wants, and to the planning for their amusement and happiness.

Having always thought of her as a little old elfish woman, I was surprised at her dignified mien.

She seemed gentle and kind ; indeed, her every look and move was kindness itself.

If time had fled her youth and beauty its place had been taken by that which was far better for my little friends.

A pleasant, benevolent smile now wreathed her fine old face ; her handsome lips were parted and showed white, even teeth ; dimples still nestled in her somewhat wrinkled cheeks ; her soft, white hair was gathered in puffs on either side of her low, broad forehead ; and her dark blue eyes had in them a look of truth, love and affectionate interest for all things. She seemed one, indeed, into whose large, motherly lap every little child who was tired and sleepy would

like to climb, and warmly resting, forget its troubles and cares.

Her dress consisted of a petticoat of dark crimson satin, so thick and rich that it would nearly stand by itself, and I presume, was one which Santa had brought to her from some far-famed Eastern loom. Over this she wore a jacket of black velvet which was richly embroidered with gold braid and trimmed upon the edge with a deep gold bullion fringe, and lined with ermine.

Around her neck was a wide frill of fine, white lace; the same was at her wrists, and her head was crowned by a cap with a broad border which was also of fine lace.

This was Kreche.

What do you think of her?

Think what you may, my little friends, this old couple had to me a wonderful look of being of veritable flesh and blood.

Santa stretched himself back in a high old oak chair which was covered with pale blue velvet, and dotted with miniature silver bees, gay butterflies, tiny humming-birds, interspersed with golden stars and crescent-shaped little moons upon corners and angles;

and placing his shapely white hand over his handsome mouth he actually—yawned.

This done, he rubbed his head, stroked his long beard, crossed and uncrossed his legs, and looking around seemed eminently satisfied with his surroundings.

Kreche rose from a chair which was even handsomer than Santa's.

It was of yellow ivory and pale sea-green velvet embroidered in wreaths of moss roses, and from its back hung chains of pale stars.

She also stood and surveyed the scene, but with a weary look upon her face as though glad that the long year's labor was done.

The fine lace border of her cap rose and fell in the zephyrus breeze which played upon the soft, white puffs of her hair; the fine rosy-tinted hands clasped and unclasped in a contented way as she viewed her works; and as she reseated herself, she evidently felt that labor and duty, here at least, had had their sway.

How did this ancient couple live? I asked of nobody.

Surely they were not a god and goddess to hold

revels with the elements and feed upon thunder and lightning.

Neither were they of Elf or Fairy tribe, and so lived by sipping nectar and ambrosia.

They were, to all seeming, like mortals; and—must I say it—Santa had a look—a look of daily feeding on just that dreadfully common every-day diet, roast beef and beer—and Kreche, too, had just as decidedly an unethereal look.

However, I smoothed over this unromantic fact by understanding that it was absolutely necessary for Santa, at least, to eat and drink with that heartiness which in its depth and breadth was wholly unlike the common man, in order to maintain that caloric which enabled him to ride with an incredible swiftness over mountain heights and swoop through sun-hid valleys, and which being often maintained against the air current, created in itself a temperature of iciness that no mortal less than he could endure.

I now looked upon his magnificent physique with admiration.

Hark! Santa is about to speak!

He calls, “Laugh-e-oo! Laugh-e-oo! Come hither!”

A little brown Gnome—which I was now pretty sure carried one of the laughing faces as well as a pair of the grotesque ankles which had so puzzled me as I sat contemplating the cold, grey boulders—came so suddenly upon the carpet that, accustomed as I had become to strange scenes and things, I actually started.

Now, as all my little readers know, “Gnomes” are thought to exist for the purpose of guarding those treasures which are supposed to be beyond the ken of man, and hid in the depths of earth; and this little brown Gnome’s mission was to guard the gastronomic treasure of Santa’s digestion, and so keep him hearty and hale.

Ah, yes! Laugh-e-oo was rightly named. He was broad; he was short; he was fat; he was laughter personified!

Laugh bubbled from his eyes, from his mouth, from the calves of his legs; with it his sides were filled; and they shook like “bowls of jelly.”

As he passed me, he gave a glance over his shoulder.

It was enough. Instantly I began to shake and laugh myself, and was glad that I had been rendered invisible.

The Gnome, Laugh-e-oo, bowed low before Santa, and then straightened with such a comic jerk that it only increased my own felt jollity. Peste!

“Laugh-e-oo, a boat of ale; and then bring in your ‘Side Shakers’!” cried Santa.

Laugh-e-oo, with his broad, merry, indicative face, quickly disappeared, but only to reappear with a silver tankard of foaming ale, which, upon his handing to Santa, the latter drained to a drop.

A moment after, hearing a soft rustling noise, I turned to see a party of dancing Gnomes, of which Laugh-e-oo seemed to be the leader, forming before Santa. They all had Laugh-e-oo’s face, ears, and big calves.

Some of these Gnomes were missioned to guard Santa’s good nature and keep him always jolly, and so by helping to aid his enormous digestion, form the useful and indispensable “caloric.”

It was easy to see that the order of things in this eyric mountain home, even if strange, was one pre-eminently wise.

Well; each of these dancing Gnomes, or “Side Shakers,” as I heard them called, and rightly, too, was a thousand Punch and Judys rolled into one great pantomime.

Their grotesque forms and faces were seconded only by their equally grotesque manners; and Santa's peals of laughter, as he viewed their antics, would have done your heart good to hear.

Tired at length of this amusement, he dismissed them with a wave of his hand which they instantly obeyed; but he called after their leader, "Laugh-e-oo, another boat of ale; let it be drawn particularly foamy and strong!

"Kreche, old wife," he added, "will you not try a bumper, too, and have it drawn distractingly mild?"

"Not any, Santa! Thanks very much!" replied Kreche, with a graceful bend of her large stately body. "As I never travel I do not need your strength-giving heat, but will keep you company by sipping a glass of my favorite honey-dew."

Taking up a silver whistle which hung by her side she sounded a musical note, which was soon answered by a fairy little creature whom I knew to be a wood-nymph, and whom she addressed as Violette.

This dainty little hand-maid, who was like a wood violet, spread a pair of gossamer leaf-shaped wings, and when Laugh-e-oo returned with his boat or tankard—

“Of jolly good ale and olde,”

she came also, and on a huge oak-leaf waiter bore a crystal cup of aromatic honey-dew, and also wafers of snow-flake sweet cake.

Balancing the waiter upon her head she stood motionless while Kreche partook, and Santa sang in a half baritone—

“I’ll stuff my skin so full within,
Of jolly good ale and olde ;
No frost or snow, no wind I trow,
Can hurt me if I wolde ;
I am so wrapte, and thoroughly lapte
In jolly good ale and olde.”

To which Kreche in a soft soprano returned—

“Whether it be new or olde,
I cannot eat but little meat,
For my stomach is not goode ;
But sure I think that I can drink
With him who wears my hoode.
I love no roast but a nut-brown toast,
And a crab laid in the fire ;
A little bread shall do me stead,
Much bread I do not desire.”

To me these toasts seemed homely and old, but they were given in such a hearty good way, and with such a loving glance between the old couple, that I thought, perhaps, they were worth bringing down to their present use.

Again sang Santa—

“ Back and side go bare, go bare,
Both foot and hand go colde ;
But belly, I'll send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or olde.
No frost or snow, no wind I trow,
Can hurt me if I wolde ;
I am so wrapte, and thoroughly lapte
In jolly good ale and olde.
Then doth thou troll to me the bowle,
Even as a malt-worm sholde ;
And belly, I'll send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or olde.”

Returned Kreche in the same soft, gentle strain—

“ Though I can eat no bread or meat,
For my stomach is not goode ;
As your sweetheart I will take my part
Of this jolly good ale and olde.”

“ Laugh-e-oo, bring *two* boats of ale? One drawn foamy and strong, the other creamy and mild !”

They were soon brought by jolly Laugh-e-oo, who seemed to think that matters were travelling in the right track, and was correspondingly happy ; while Santa continued to sing—

“ And here’s to the year that is past, my dear,
A year of worke and toile ;
We have done much goode, to those we wolde,
And no grime our hands have soiled.
'Tis not for golde, to be bought and solde,
That we’ve done this worke of love ;
For never a day but has had its play,
And all mercies that it sholde.
Then drink, sweetheart, and take a parte,
Come troll to me the bowle ;
That I may wrap, and thoroughly lap
Myself in good ale and olde.”

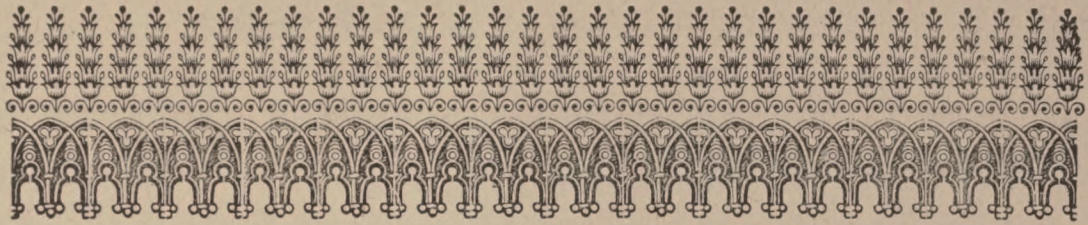
To this Kreche replied—

“ Sure I think that I can drinke,
To him who wears my hoode ;
Let back nor side go bare, go bare,
Nor foot nor hand go colde.
So here, my hearte, I drink a parte,

Whether it be new or olde ;
Full oft then lap, and thoroughly wrap
Yourself in goode ale and olde."

Here the toasts ended, and each lapsed into
thought.





CHAPTER IV.

THE YEAR'S LABOR.

“ O ! THEN I see Queen Mab—and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomies
Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep ;
Her wagon spokes, made of long spinner's legs,
The cover, of the wings of grasshoppers,
The traces, of the smallest spider's web,
The colors, of the moonshine's watery beams
Her whip, of cricket bone ; the lash, of film ;
Her wagoner, a small grey-coated gnat,
Not half so big as a round little worm,
Pricked from the lazy finger of a maid.
Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut,
Made by the joiner, squirrel, or old grub,
Time out of mind the fairies' coach makers ;
And in this state she gallops night by night.”

For a few minutes, the only sounds heard by me in the great hall where Santa and Kreche were sitting were the soft notes of the cuckoo ; the gentle drip,

drip of the fountains, and the wash of the wavelets in the near yet far-off lakes.

At length Santa turned toward Kreche, and with a pleasant expression upon his countenance, said, "Old wifey, our work for this year is nearly done."

"Yes, Santa, all but the packing, which I will do while you are asleep."

"You must crowd more than you did last year, wife. I am getting so broad and heavy now-a-days that you hardly give me room to sit; and some of the chimneys are very, very long and narrow. Really"—and here he laid a hand on his full stomach—"unless Laugh-e-oo takes much care, I am afraid that so much squeezing will injure my digestion and power for generating the indispensable caloric. Kreche, have you put all the ears and tails on that last lot of cats and dogs?"

"Yes, Santa."

At this question and its answer I looked around. In every direction lay the result of their year's labor.

Pile upon pile. Heap upon heap. Acres. Mountains. Toys of every description, even the most complicated of Chinese and other Oriental manufacture; and wonderful beauties they were, too.

Such fans ; so rich ; so gayly painted ; so strange in shape ; such girdles of wrought gold and silver ; such carved boxes within boxes ; such vases of painted ivory ; such embroidered silks and satins ; such parasols and sunshades ; such caps of woven cane ; such tiny shoes of wood ; such pipes for smoking opium ; such gilded dragons whose use I could not determine ; such sets of painted porcelain ; such unique chessmen ; such elegant sedan chairs ; such clear mirrors in fantastic frames ; such lovely white mice in cages ; such fat little puppies for pies ; such ornamented boxes for perfumes ; such families of pure white kittens ; and oh ! such dolls and dolls ; such—such—things—most rich and gorgeous, and such as an Eastern monarch might choose for the capricious inmates of his harem ; or such as a dainty belle of our time might dream of ; or such as a practical mother of a large ambitious family would deem most fitting ; down to the plainest jumping-jack which an American boy might have whittled with a dull knife.

I turned to hear what further Santa might say ; it was this :

“And, Kreche, have you filled the Noah’s arks full?”

"Yes, yes."

"And smoothed off the last forty thousand pairs of drum-sticks?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Painted the trumpets, carts, wagons, wheelbarrows, carriages, steamers, boats, velocipedes, and all the rest of their tribe?"

"Yes."

"Put the manes and tails on all the horses, besides adjusting the saddles and bridles?"

"All are done."

"Got the knives, tops, jacks, kites and balloons all ready?"

"All ready."

"The mittens, hoods, scarfs, sacks, stockings and shoes?"

"I believe so."

"And have not forgotten the dolls of every size with their wardrobes, carriages, cradles and play-houses, I'll warrant?"

"Not I, Santa; I look out for the little girls, for I don't forget that I was once a little girl myself!"

"So you were, Kreche; and a pretty one, too, I ween."

Kreche looked pleasedly at him while, as his eyes still beamed upon her, he continued to ask :

“ And placed the watches, chains, necklaces, rings, bracelets, diamonds and pearls all of high and low degree in their satin-lined or other cases for the young ladies ? ”

“ They are in order. ”

“ Fixed up the furniture, mirrors, carpets, paintings, pianos, organs, silver-plate and china-ware for the matrons ? ”

“ They are remembered, Santa, for I am a matron. ”

“ Ah ! yes ; and how well I know what a notable one ! Got the dressing-gowns, slippers, smoking-caps, cigar-cases, meerschaums and tobacco-pouches for the gentlemen ? ”

“ And would I forget them, think, when you are such a gentleman, Santa ? ”

“ No, no ! That you wouldn't ! And, Kreche, have you tipped that little wand with which I, at your suggestion, am to touch the hearts of sleeping misers and compel them to remember the poor of every clime, and open their purse-strings at the cry of distress ? ”

"Here it is, Santa. I have tipped it with gold and asked a blessing upon its work."

"Thank you, Kreche! And is everything marked to go in the right place?"

"Everything."

"Haven't got the different countries mixed?"

"Assuredly not, Santa?"

"Not one of the Spanish ladies' veils put in with the fur caps of the Russian?"

"No."

"Nor a pair of skates for the boy living near the equator?"

"I have not even indulged in that joke, Santa!"

"Well, I didn't suppose you had Kreche; but I thought I would ask."

Just here I said to myself, how much that last sounds like the questions asked by our men of the outer world.

"Got everything you need for our little attendants here?"

"Yes, I think so."

"O! by the way, Kreche, have you seen anything lately of our coquettish little 'Vixen'?"

"Yes; about a week ago I saw her strolling down 'Lover's Lane' with that fly-a-way, 'Prancer.'"

"Did you, now? Well, he brought her up before me one day, and dolefully said, 'that she had stolen his heart and made way with it; and wanted me to bid her either give it back to him, or offer him her own in return!' To tell the truth, Kreche, I couldn't get the saucy 'Vixen' to say which she would do.

"And there is 'Comet;' she is going on in very much the same way; only she has 'Cupid' to deal with, and I expect and really hope that she will meet her equal. I have more trouble with those 'eight tiny reindeer' than all the other inmates of our home. I expect they are capering off in the pine forest somewhere, and although they know that it only lacks a few hours of my starting, they won't come in until they hear the music."

"Ah! well, Santa, let them rove the while and enjoy the beauties of this eyric home.

"Our limbs are getting too old and stiff to indulge in the jollities of the past. Even the yearly wedding reel has become like work. Let us sit and talk of our youth—that mystic time that is gone forever from us!"

"Yes, yes; we will do that by-and-by—but seri-

ously, Kreche, I wish when the reindeer come in that you would give that saucy 'Vixen', coquettish 'Comet', and vain 'Dancer', a rather severe lecture. They are continually flirting with 'Prancer' and 'Cupid', as well as some others.

"And then, too, there is that grotesque Laugh-e-oo! He has asked permission to pair off with modest Violette.

"I have told him again and again that he must adhere to caste. That Gnomes and Nymphs or Naiads cannot amalgamate.

"He will not listen to reason, but proposes to boldly form a new order of things. Peste, take him!

"Then there is Agag, the fighting Elf-king; what does he do but put in a proposition to take one of the Fairy-queens for a bride.

"Of course, should I allow that to take place, we would at once be in the centre of a pigmy war. There would be battles and rumors of battles until we could not sleep.

"And now every time I walk abroad, I expect those sea-green Mermaids will waylay me, and in a song ask to marry some old scaly sea-serpent; and so complete the general motley.

"I have been too indulgent! Before I begin another year's work these matters must be straightened. While I am out on my ride, I wish you would pave matters for me by hinting to some of the Queens that no more marriages like that of Huge Bumble Bee and Tiny White Mouse can take place."

"O! Santa, how can I, when Tiny and Bumble are so happy?"

"Happy! You'll see how happy they will be in a short time!"

"But we are happy, Santa."

"We are not bees and mice! Kreche, do you ever wish that you were anything different from what you are?"

"Never!"

"I am sure I hope not! A few minutes ago you expressed a desire to review the past."

"Let us do so."





CUPID AND CAMPASPE PLAYING CARDS FOR KISSES.

Chap. V.



CHAPTER V.

SANTA TELLS OF HIS COURTSHIP.

“CUPID and my Campaspe played
At cards for kisses ; Cupid paid ;
He stakes his quiver, bow, and arrows ;
His mother’s doves and team of sparrows ;
Loses them, too, then down he throws
The coral of his lip ; the rose
Growing on ’s cheek (but none knows how),
With these the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple of his chin ;
All these did my Campaspe win.
At last he set her both his eyes ;
She won ; and Cupid blind did rise.
O, Love ! has she done this to thee ?
What shall, alas, become of me ?”

I KNEW that a little love scene was now about to be enacted between Santa and Kreche.

How did I know it? some gallant little boy or modest little girl asks.

Well, I knew it by the gathering near of a flock

of turtle doves; by the marching forward of the grandly spread peacock, and his train of irridescent-eyed beauties; by the Elf-king's drawing nigh, with ear bent to catch every word; by the appearance of the Fairy-queens who had roused from their rose-leafed beds and ambrosia-fed slumber, and were hiding around Kreche's chair; by catching a glimpse of Laugh-e-oo who had ensconced himself behind a venerable oak tree, and was peering in every direction for a sight of Violette; by that rustling from the pine forest, which told that "Vixen" and "Prancer," "Comet" and "Cupid," "Dancer" and others were on the watch to catch Santa in a love passage, and then use it as a tender in their own case; by the many foam-rings of the Water-sprites, which were so thrown as to catch the golden light of a mellow sunbeam; by the opening and closing of the gay wings of the butterflies, as they indolently rested in their flight to hear; by the queen honey-bee's leaving her seclusion to dreamily gaze at the old couple; by catching a gleam of the hand-mirrors of the Mermaids, as they threw up their beautiful arms and renewed the moss-wreaths on the conch-shell chairs in the marble grottoes; by the shrieks of the gay

plumaged paroquets, being robbed of their harshness and attuned to something like harmony ; by the placid gentleness of the wave of the long drooping branches of the weeping elms ; by the perfumes shed by the mammoth roses and oleanders in the hanging gardens ; by the opening of the white lilies, and by a thousand signs which told that something rich and rare was about to take place, and that if I were wise I, too, would be on the alert.

Santa took Kreche by the hand and drew her toward him. His arm stole near her. He gently seated her upon his knee ; and while holding her thus, with one arm around her waist, he parted the silvery hair from her brow, gazed into her truthful, bright blue eyes, stroked her soft wrinkled cheeks, and kissed her.

“Kreche, dear wife,” said he, “I remember when ‘Cupid’ I, ‘Campaspe’ thou, we played at kissing. Your hair was bright as the rising love-star ; your brows were like bent bows ; your forehead like the white lilies’ glow ; your cheeks like milk and roses ; and above your dimpled chin was this bank of kisses for which we played.

“You won ; and I builded for you from the fibres

of my heart a chariot of love ; placed you therein ; and running by your side, brought you to this, my eyric home !

“ Here, through ceaseless rolling years we have dwelt—happy I, contented you ; I your fortune, you my star !

“ Here with united hands we have done and are still doing a work of beauteous love ; for the world’s beauty is comprised of love.

“ Priests and poets sing its power ; brush and pencil mark its charms ; castle and dungeon wear its chains ; water nor fire cannot it quench ; nor air, nor earth can hold it down !

“ It fills all space ! It centres in eternity ! It is the fairest of all the heaven-born attributes !

“ Kreche, these hands of yours have toiled for me ; and mine, for you. Will any other Santa ever take my place ? or any other Kreche yours ?

“ The world’s progress lies in change, and we must be prepared to at any time throw down our love-united sceptres, and give place to some steam or electric power which, perhaps, in its history, will set us down as banished monsters, who once a year were permitted, by the ‘ Powers,’ to hold their satyr dance around the beds of sleepers——”

At a thought of such ingratitude from the world, Kreche's head dropped upon Santa's shoulder, and her arms stole around his neck.

Glistening tears stood upon his eyelashes as he stroked her soft white hair.

Kreche at last raised her head from his shoulder ; a look of happy, satisfied affection resting upon her fine old face.

"Santa, my husband, notwithstanding your prediction that there is an age coming when we will be by the world forgot, and our loving intentions transmuted to works of evils instead of good, I am a thousand fold repaid for all toil and care by a knowledge of your enduring love ; that your eyric home has been my home ; your eyric people, my people ; your eyric work, my work !

"In these little golden circlets which span the finger-cords that lead to and feed our hearts, lies the talisman which makes you mine and I yours.

"Through their magnetic influence, happiness and that perfect bliss which no mortal outside of our eyric home can ever know, reigns with us !

"It is the intensified soul bliss of the gods, tempered by our mortal bodies !

“ Hid from the world by the rock guarded sides of our eyric abode, no disturbing woes, no jealous elements, can intrude, while the talisman is worn bright in performing works of love ! ”

Here they each kissed the ring upon the other's finger, while Laugh-e-oo stood out from behind the oak-tree and boldly winked at the modest little Violette, as much as to say, “ Won't this be a rich scene to bring before the old fellow's memory if he dares refuse my suit for your hand ? ”

The Elf-king, Agag, shouldered his war-lance and looked fiercely at the fairest of the Fairy-queens.

The coquetting “ Vixen ” and “ Comet ” gave each a little sniff, as though such long devotedness was something of which they would never be guilty.

The turtle doves billed and cooed and dressed down their pretty plumage.

Foam-rings lay in circles on the curling face of the little murmuring streams.

The butterflies closed their gayly painted wings as though meditating upon what they had just heard.

The queen honey-bee went with a contented air back to her seclusion.

The Mermaids placed fresh moss-wreaths on the

conch-shell chairs, and added to them strings of love-coral.

The paroquets repeated, “ ‘ *No disturbing cares ; no jealous elements shall ever here intrude !* ’ ”

The waving elms and flowering locusts entwined their long branch-like arms, and rustled their leaves with a hidden meaning ; while the roses and olean-
ders shed a stronger mingled perfume ; and I—well, I fell to thinking—take care, Kreche, lest in thy hour of boasting thou dost fall !

While this very outer-world thought was running through my brain, and I was observing how visibly all nature, even to myself, was being affected by the love passages of this famous old couple, and wondering where, in my hurry, I had put my handkerchief—for during Santa and Kreche’s conversation I had so entered into the spirit of it that I felt a tear was standing in the corner of my eye—my ears were touched by the sound of sweet floating music. It seemed to be coming from the dells and caves and grottoes, and wafted down in gentle gusts from the tops of the feather-palms and flowering locusts.

“ What will be the next scene on the carpet in this eyric home ? ” I asked myself.



THE REINDEER QUADRILLE.

Chap. VI.



CHAPTER VI.

SANTA AND KRECHE'S HOUR OF GLADNESS.

“THE moon's a gallant ;”
The stars shine fair.
The Mermaids comb their silky hair.
The Fairy-queen leads out the dance.
The Elf-king starts with couched lance,
The Water-sprites throw rings of foam.
Bees and butterflies hie them home.
The birds doth cease their matin song,
And twilight doth her hour prolong.

ENCHANTING music now filled the air as though the breaths of a thousand Æolian harps were being wafted through a light which every moment was growing more and more beautiful.

This light disclosed what I had not before noticed, that a lovely carpet of mossy-green, and made gay by low-growing flowers, was spread beneath Santa and Kreche, who still sat in a pleased reverie, while the smiles which were creeping over their faces so lighted them up as to give a look of half youth.

The music and light intensified.

I heard a near clatter of hoofs.

Turning my head, I was surprised to see the "eight tiny reindeer," which are now as well known to the Christmas world as is Santa Claus himself, come bounding in a body from out a side forest of tall hemlocks and pines.

Long pink-eared rabbits were straying in from the rank grass; birds with the gayest of gay plumage were twittering, fluttering, hovering through the branches of the orange and lemon trees; the gay butterflies were continually folding and dipping their mottled wings; stray bees came humming home; even the dolls and toys, which were still unpacked, tried to seemingly arrange themselves in something like order, and as though they were hardly inanimate upon this joyous occasion.

I drew back a little, thinking I might be in the way, and forgetting for the moment the power of the "Invisible Ointment;" and have no doubt but that others standing near me also drew back, and from the same motive.

Santa raised his head, the pleasant smile upon his face causing it to fairly beam with light. He rose

from his chair, and gallantly approaching Kreche, said, "Dear wife, shall we commemorate this, the two hundredth anniversary of our wedding-day, by dancing '*our* Wedding Reel'?"

"As you please, Santa. I am happy enough just now to join in anything that will give you pleasure!" answered Kreche.

The music grew loud and clear.

Santa, again, in his indescribably gallant way, took Kreche by the hand and led her out upon the floor.

After swaying back and forth in old-fashioned rhythm for the purpose of catching the pulse of the music, they postured for the dance.

Santa bowed low to his partner, who curtesied in return, with the grace of a queen. He kissed the tips of his well-shaped fingers and waved them toward her. She returned the salute. He encircled her waist with his arm. They wheeled. They turned. They waltzed. They dipped. They rolled and giggled and laughed and shouted.

"Ha! ha! my Kreche!" and he chucks her chin.

"Ha! ha! dear Santa!" and she twitches his beard.

"Old Kreche! You beauty!"

“Old Santa! You gallant!”

He whistles and chuckles and wags his head.

The little reindeers come forward and join in the “Reel;” shake their branching antlers; and circle around the old couple, who observe them in great glee and merriment.

The gay-plumaged birds swoop down toward the dancers as though to make their obeisance, and then rise on flashing wing; the butterflies ope and close their tinted wings, while the waterfalls and cascades send up their most rhythmical murmurings.

The dance kept up for an hour; the music, after a little, growing fainter and fainter as well as slower and slower. It ceased. Santa and Kreche were nearly out of breath. Again bowing low, and Kreche curtesying with grace, Santa led his partner to her chair. She sank into it so breathlessly that the chains of silver stars which were suspended from its back quivered and glinted with the motion; while Santa’s nose, as he sought his own particular seat, was like a “cherry” indeed.

“On with the dance!” he shouted, with a gesture which embraced all in its meaning.

The light-hoofed “Vixen,” with “Prancer” by her

side, and closely followed by "Comet" and "Cupid," with the other four of the tiny reindeers, sprang into the circle.

This circle was formed by the peacocks standing spread tail to tail, and as the pretty, rosy light fell upon them, it was a scene for the gods whose favorite bird they are to admire.

The music was renewed, but with a double-quick measure.

The reindeers formed a hollow square, something similar to the old-fashioned quadrille.

"Vixen" and "Prancer" led.

Eight hoofs around; forward and back; Does change; galopade all; forward the Bucks; forward again and swing Does to their place; galopade all! Does to the right; Bucks to the left; balance your partners; *galopade all*; GALOPADE ALL; GALOPADE ALL; etc., etc.

"Vixen's" antlers were waving everywhere, while her bright eyes gleamed—now, upon "Prancer," now brighter yet upon "Cupid;" and "Comet" was not a whit behind.

When the music ceased, they all declared that it had been a dashing quadrille.

What is this? Another company forming within the peacocks' circle?

Laugh-e-oo, the leader of the Gnomes, dressed in a garb of dun brown, and with the bulging calves of his short legs—which, by the way, he considered his most beautiful feature, and depended greatly upon their charm to win the hand of Violette—more bulging and knotted and gnarled than ever; his grotesquely shaped head ornamented with an abundance of vine-tendrils that stood out like cork-screws; and his monstrously long ears looped behind his neck; led out the modest little Violette, the queen of the wood-nymphs.

Her robe was of russet-green velvet, and trimmed with a fringe and chains of chincapin berries.

Opposite them stood Agag, the Elf-king, with shouldered lance; and by his side, the fairest of the Fairy-queens.

This was a circle dance. It was pretty and graceful, but beyond my time or power to describe so as to be understood.

Laugh-e-oo took the occasion to impress upon Violette the fact of his ardent admiration of and never-dying love for her dear self! while Agag

fiercely vowed, that if the Fairy queen refused his suit, he would carry her off to some dark, damp, subterranean dungeon, and then fill his lance to the hold with her impaled subjects! But, I presumed that these same things had been told for the two hundredth time.

The next occupants of the circle were the bride and groom, "Tiny White Mouse" and "Squire Huge Bumble Bee."

Tiny wore her bridal robe of ermine and mantle of red silk; the Squire had also retained his evening dress suit, with waistcoat of orange and black.

The set was filled out with that long-legged couple—Mr. and Mrs. Grass Hopper; Mr. and Mrs. Royal Butterfly; and Mr. and Mrs. Black Beetle.

All were more or less gorgeously attired, and they danced to the soft music of the cock-chaffer, sharply timed by the notes of the cricket.

During the time in which these strange couples of whom I have been telling had occupied the floor, and Santa and Kreche had been resting, I noticed, as my eyes now and then sought the old couple, that Kreche's left hand was visibly affected.

It moved and twitched with a spasmodic motion,

and seemed not wholly free from pain, for she often held and rubbed and tried to keep it from dropping by her side.

Her before placid brow was now seamed, wrinkled, and severely corrugated, while her sharp frosty blue eyes snapped and twinkled like the stars which shone above her.

Prythee, the cause? Had aught offended?

Santa, himself, sat not wholly at ease.

With his left hand he pulled and jerked at his long white beard; glared at Laugh-e-oo and Agag; shook his head and stamped his foot at "Vixen" and "Comet;" threw fierce glances toward the marble grottoes, where the Mermaids were combing their long silky hair; and the curling streams instantly dropped their foam-rings and ceased their rippling murmurs.

What does this agitation of the old couple mean? I inwardly asked myself.

Ah! in the next scene I was humorously and sadly informed.



CHAPTER VII.

THE VAGARIES OF SANTA AND KRECHE.

“ HERE is a box full of bumble-bees.”

* * * * *

“ Hard words that are

So nimble, and so full of flame

As it every one from whence they came

Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,

And had resolved to live a fool the rest

Of his dull life.”

SANTA still continued to occasionally beam upon his ancient partner, and as though his love was centred in her.

“ Kreche, love, what is that laying at your feet ? ” he said, at last.

“ Why,” she sadly answered, and at the same time stooped and gathered some fine white tufts in her hand, “ it is bleached ‘ wool of the beaver ’ ! O, Santa, this is what I will do with it ! Knit another thousand pairs of tiny little mittens for those dear little babies, who, somewhere in the world, will this

night be left motherless! And, O, Santa, you must promise me that you will draw these little mittens on their tiny pink hands and tie them, as you know I would do! And, Santa, one thing more; don't forget to kiss them for me!"

"Yes, Kreche, I will kiss them for you."

"Santa, you may kiss *all* the little girls and boys for me to-night."

"Yes, yes; I'll kiss all the *little* boys and girls for you, my Kreche, and—and—all—all—the—the—the young—the young ladies for—for myself—ah!"

"'Kiss the young ladies for yourself?' For 'yourself,' Santa Claus?"

"Yes, for myself. Why shouldn't I?"

"Why shouldn't you?" Why shouldn't you! I am amazed! Indeed, then, you *shan't* kiss them neither for yourself nor me!" and now Kreche's fine blue eyes blazed most frostily in her jealous anger.

"Shan't, eh? We'll see! I would like to know how you are going to prevent my kissing whom I please? Madam, *you* will remain at home, while *I* go abroad!"

"That is no matter. At home or abroad I will brook no kissing of girls in their teens! You shall kiss only me!"

(Here I again began to think that this couple was not so very unlike the residents of my outer world, after all.)

“You are a pretty wife for a gentleman of my reputation to save his kisses for, ain’t you? A gentleman who is renowned the wide world over for his gifts and—and gallantry! must save my kisses for an old woman like you, eh? with a waist like a barrel; shoe like a cradle; and fist like a sledge hammer! A woman between two and three hundred years old! Ha! ha! ha! What an absurdity! ‘*I must!*’ eh?”

“You need not tell me that I am old, *Mr.* Santa Claus! I think I am every bit as young as yourself! You are a very youthful gentleman certainly, to think of kissing young girls. And when you speak of your ‘reputation for gifts and gallantry,’ where would be your ‘gifts,’ pray, if I did not remain at home and prepare them? Of your ‘gallantry’—well, all men have enough of that, I ween! I next wonder that you did not brag of your outer-world beauty!” and shutting eyes and clasping hands she satirically continued: “Methinks I see a gentleman dressed for Christmas calls.

“ In youth, he is tender ;
In form, erect and slender ;
In experience, gosling green ;
In love, like syrup run to waste ;
In kissing, a blundering baboon ;
In dress, a man milliner ;
In drink, claret and ale to the lees ;
In food, a consumer that mortifies.

“ Years roll on apace.

“ The tender youth who once was so slender and erect has assumed a stuffed appearance ; his gosling green experience has changed to a pompous surety ; the syrup of his kisses has the tinge of ferment, while his baboonish manner has but intensified ; the dress of the man milliner has taken on the spots of a clown ; the claret gives place to beer ; the consumption of food still mortifies.

“ Cycles still roll.

“ His old fur coat is all rags and tags ; covered with soot and cinders ; smells of pot-grease and garlic, to say nothing of a taint from an old pipe.

“ His nose is red and a veritable snub ; his cheeks are bloated and purple ; his locks white and tangled ; his steeds are horned ; his reins not silken ; his coach

unpolished; his command a vulgar whistle. He travels at night instead of day; enters houses unbidden; leaves in a hurry; and shuns observation.

“He thinks—O, Santa, dear one, my heart is breaking!” cried Kreche, stretching out her hands.

She started from her chair, a look of astonishment superceding grief.

The perspiration rolled in drops from her face!

She clasped her hands in agony, while her body swayed to and fro and heaved in such convulsive throbs that I feared for her the worst.

The little handmaid and wood-nymph, Violette, spread her gossamer wings, and calling her sister nymphs to her aid, she bid them hasten and prepare a nectar of honey-dew, and with double strength.

“Vixen” came bringing a bough of aromatic pine, and with a well of trouble in her now soft and tender eyes.

The eldest of the Fairy-queens approached and begged permission to lay her all-healing wand upon the sufferer’s breast.

The Elf-king snapped his choicest lances in twain, and with aspect fierce and foot boldly set, presented them upon his shields as antidotes against evils.

Laugh-e-oo, with indicative face, smoothed of every wrinkle of jollity, brought the two boats of

“Jolly good ale and olde,”

and poured them as a libation at Kreche’s feet.

The Mermaids prepared pillows of the softest sea-moss, and held them aloft in their beautiful arms that they might attract the attention of denizens of the air who soon swooped, and gathering them in their talons, bore them as rests for Kreche’s head, and she thus knew, as she felt their smooth, rocking, wavy motion, that her devoted creatures in the grottoes, while they could not leave their element to seek her side, were not forgetful of her sufferings; and meanwhile they sat and with their beautiful hair wiped away the crystal tears which streamed from their eyes.

The peacocks advanced and offered their beautiful plumage as fans to bring near the zephyrus breezes to cool her brow.

The stars held their twinkle; and the moon no longer gallanting, mournfully dipped again and again her crescent horn; as Kreche faintly cried, “Santa!”

Santa stood transfixed with horror!

Beseechingly he looked around upon all!

To him the heavens grew dark, and every color began to dim and fade!

With a step that was as laggard as though weighted with all the boulders that sided his eyric home, he at a snail's pace advanced.

Kreche turned her blue eyes toward him, and, as she feebly stretched out her hand, moaned in accents that nearly severed his heart in twain.

"My ring! my ring! Santa, my wedding-ring is gone! Help! Help to find it! Come! Come all things, animate and inanimate; seen and unseen; and search with me for my wedding-ring!"





AGAG, THE ELF-KING, PREPARING TO HUNT FOR THE WEDDING RING.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECONCILIATION.

“ FOLDED arms and fixed eyes,
A sigh that piercing mortifies ;
A look that’s fastened on the ground,
A tongue chained up without a sound.

* * * * *

The wind blows out, the bubble dies ;
The dew’s dried up, the star is shot,
The storm is past, the loss forgot.”

“ O, SANTA ! ” cried Kreche, “ the loss of the ring is the cause of our quarrel ! As soon as the talisman of love and peace took flight, discord and jealousy entered in !

“ My heart was no longer light and happy, but lay like a burdensome weight of lead in my breast ! Our eyric home grew to be a dungeon in its seclusion ! My life seemed a banishment to unrequited toil ! Even you, whom I so love, grew to be a monster whose hand was gripe of steel !

“Let us to the search !

“I know by the return of that talismanic strength to my hand and heart that the ring is not far away !

“Come !” she cried. “Come ! All things animate and inanimate ! Seen and unseen ! Come ! Come ! I command ! Come ! to the search ! Sight and labor spare not !”

Now, I being one of the unseen animates, obeyed the command, and began the search by casting eyes around everywhere for the ring, thinking, meantime, that it could not, as Kreche had said, be far away ; for it was only in the rollicking of the wedding-reel that it had slipped from her finger, and unperceived rolled to its hiding place.

With rout and snort the “eight tiny reindeer,” with antlers high set and noses to the ground, led the search. Each pawing hoof trod upon air ; “Vixen,” with humble dignity, did not disdain the putting of her aristocratic little nose in places that, an hour before, she would have spurned ; at the same time rebuked the *amours* of “Prancer,” who could not resist, at such a time and place, to hint that he hoped to place his wedding-ring so securely in her little pink nostrils that it would never lose.

"Comet" was in a craze.

Her soft dark eyes had now two objects upon which they longed at once to rest—the "ring" and "Cupid." Noticing "Vixen's" demureness, and the laying aside of her many coquettish ways, might she not herself take a double liberty, and pay off Cupid for his many side flirtations, by wringing his heart with jealousy, at seeing her continue the search for the ring in the society of "Dunder," who, she knew, had long wanted to come to her side and express his admiration of her silky, yellow-brown coat, delicate antlers, tiny hoofs and beautiful eyes.

Yes, she would.

With a frisky antic which took her from "Cupid's" side, she left him standing in astonishment to place herself by "Dunder," and with beaming glance and shake of her pretty head, rendered him nearly unfit to continue the search.

Laugh-e-oo's bulging calves, which seemed to have the power of expanding and contracting at will, now dwindled to mere nothing, in order that he might have less weight with which to cope in this active labor of finding the precious circlet,

He marshalled his Gnome-band around him, ex-

plained the loss, and selecting the most keen-sighted and attentive of them all, placed them in the field with the command to neither eat, drink, nor sleep until the trophy could be borne to their eyrie Queen.

As for himself, with sad countenance and hanging ears, he sought the sphere of Violette to ask, if it were possible for her to ever let the token of his love lie so hid and uncared for?

Violette, who had just completed her orders to have such a potion concocted and swallowed by her most astute follower as would throw her into a deep sleep, and in an agonized dream disclose the place of the golden hoop paused and turned to assure Laugh-e-oo that, Never! never! roam where she might, over mountains or through dells, or the most subterranean caves, as she hoped to sometime do with him, would she allow his ring to pass from her custody, and, as a further and efficient guard, she told that she was having a score of attendants daily trained in watching and guarding her hand, although, as yet, there was nothing on it; a sarcastic hint which caused Laugh-e-oo to broadly smile way back of his ear on one side of his face, as it was an admission that he was her favored one, and cry upon the

other side until the ear wiped the tears away, that his suit had not been sanctioned by Santa.

Agag, the Elf-king, as soon as the command of Kreche reached his ear, struck fire upon a flint, and bringing to an altar composed of nutshells, a sheaf of ripe grain and a bundle of poppy-heads, he laid them thereon, and then catching fire on the point of his lance, applied it thereto, and in the smoke which ascended bathed face and hands, and in the burning embers heated the points of lances, which he afterward distributed to such of the Elves as he wished to trust in this momentous matter of hunting the ring.

Each Elf so chosen threw the fire-charmed lance given him across his back; put on his armor of chestnut-burr; and taking up a shield of toughened frog-skin, declared himself as equipped for battle and anxious to be led to the very front!

The Fairy-queens gathered together their wands and potion-filters, and after retipping the former, filled to the brim the latter, and with many incantations and weird ceremonies, hastened to the disastrous circle and entered the arena at the same moment and opposite Agag, who, bowing low, sent

forward his own attendant with a shield bearing a tear, a kiss, and a fierce threat.

The rabbits laid their long pink ears back, and let their tender eyes rove behind every blade of grass and hanging leaf; the bees sought under every clover blossom, while their queen sat and shook her wise little head; butterflies hung low in the air, and remained motionless with wings outspread, and in readiness to bear the ring to Kreche as soon as it was found.

The gay-plumaged birds vied with each other in securing to themselves the most sightly twigs, and then, with eyes obliquely set, jealously scanned every nodding fern, waving leaf, or swaying flower. The chirping cricket, croaking grasshopper, musical cock-chaffer, and every insect of note, ceased its song and silently joined in the search.

The peacocks, forming the circle, gladly admitted all that came, but sternly refused a return of any one until the ring was found.

The Mermaids veiled their eyes with their long beautiful hair and wept salty tears, sang mournful dirges which sounded like the sougling and sighing of wave and wind over a sea wreck, and swung their

shining mirrors to catch a beam from the gold circlet and so disclose its hidden place.

The sad murmur of the little streams told that the Water-sprites had shut themselves within their sea-shell homes, and, in their sorrow were crooning dirge-like notes.

Santa, too, was alert; but in kindness stood and supported Kreche, who, until the ring was restored to her finger, was painfully feeble.

He saw the ring, and in a low pleased tone disclosed its whereabouts to Kreche.

I, too, saw the ring.

A bright halo of warm rosy light was encircling it; outside was a guard of happy Fairy-queens with wands elevated; they, in turn, were surrounded by the battle line of Elves whose king, Agag, was their centre; while the air was filled with the flashing wings of birds, bees, butterflies and insect life, and rife with a melodious rhythm from earth, air and water.

Kreche, as soon as her eyes rested upon the talisman of her love, grew in strength, and Santa, finding that he could safely leave her did so; and gathering

the ring in his hand, bore it to her and placed it upon her finger.

The song, the gladness, the outbursts of joy in that eyric home, I will leave my little readers to imagine!





CHAPTER IX.

SANTA.

“COME, Kreche, troll to me the bowl,
E'en as a malt worm sholde ;
As my sweetheart come take your part
Of this jolly goode ale and olde.
No frost or snow, no wind I trow,
Shall hurt me if I wolde ;
I am so wrapte, and thoroughly lapte
In jolly goode ale and olde.”

KRECHE.

She serves the meal ; she takes the stitch ;
She shoes the nag ; the traces hitch ;
A watch she keeps of fleeting hours
While Santa roams through Somnus' bowers.

As soon as ever the ring was restored to Kreche's finger, not only were she and Santa themselves again, but so also were their attendants.

Elves, Fairies, Gnomes Water-sprites, Wood-nymphs, Mermaids, with bird and insect, vanished to their familar haunts, as Santa gallantly seated Kreche



LAUGH-E-OO GOES WITH A RING TO COURT VIOLETTE. *Chap. IX.*

in her ivory chair, causing the chains of stars to twinkle and swing; and as he then turned to his own seat, the little crescent moons upon each corner and angle glowed and threw out a pale red light of gladness.

“Laugh-e-oo!” he shouted, “two boats of ale; one drawn foamy and strong, the other creamy and mild!”

Laugh-e-oo, with calves again enormously bulging, soon brought the silver tankards, one of which Santa gallantly passed to Kreche.

She took the cup from his hand, that she might honor his toasts, but at the next moment ordered a glass of honey-dew and wafers of sweet snow-cakes, as they were all that she needed for her refreshment.

Santa, in his gladness, almost shouted as he waved his glass toward her:

“Come, my sweetheart, and take your parte,
And troll to me the bowle;
So often drinke, that ye may thinke,
I cannot be a-colde.

Though ride I will o’er mount and hill,
Through dale and valley bold;
Ne’er back nor side ’ll go bare, go bare,

Nor foot nor hand 'll go colde,
For with ale within and love's charm without,
Nought 'll harm me if I wolde."

Kreche joyfully answered his toast in the same strain, and then drew freely of her distilled honey-dew and ate her sweet snow-cakes.

Silence prevailed for a few moments in the eyric home, and then Santa rather sadly remarked, "that there was still much to do."

"O, yes! but, old love, let me do that much while you rest?"

"Can you pack the sleigh; feed the reindeers; set their shoes, and see that they are tightly fastened and sharply pointed?"

"Oh! so easily!"

"And, Kreche, dear, cannot you also take a few stitches in the back of my fur coat?"

"And, I believe, too, that the toe of one my boots needs a little attention. I tore both coat and boot when last I rode, in descending a tall narrow chimney in St. Petersburg.

"And now I think of it, I must have a new cap.

"I became so warm while filling stockings in Genoa that I took my head-gear for a fan, and laying

it down for a moment, that I might have the use of both hands to crowd a very large 'Claude' into a very small stocking, I became startled at the near approach of the lady for whom it was intended, and fled up the chimney in such hot haste that the cap was left behind.

"I remember thinking it was luck that I had finished my visits to the lands of snow and ice, or I might thereafter have had to ride with a cold pate.

"Laugh-e-oo! bring ale!"

It was soon brought by the laughing Gnome, who, delighted at the return of the old-time jolliness, was more funnily grotesque than ever.

"Art happy, Laugh-e-oo? Be happier still! Violette shall be thine!" exclaimed Santa, as he took the foaming bowl from the faithful Gnome's hand.

Laugh-e-oo turned a thousand somersaults in the air, and at each turn his calves expanded until his head was a mere speck in comparison.

In this ridiculous plight he sought the shades which were haunted by modest Violette to securely place the coveted ring upon her little finger, while Santa sang—

“O, belly, I’ll send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or olde ;
To warm me while I boldly ride
O’er mountains high and colde.
Then, my dear love, come take your parte,
And troll to me the bowle ;
That frost nor snow, nor wind I trowe,
Can hurt me if I wolde.
Though I go bare, take ye no care,
I’ll nothing be a-colde ;
For I’ll stuff my skin so full within
Of this jolly good ale and olde.”

“Laugh-e-oo ! send me Agag !”

A moment sufficed to bring the Elf-king.

He came with an aspect that was bold and haughty, while his eye had the gleam of an eagle’s.

“Ah ! Agag, thou art here !

“Now, what deeds of valor hast thou ever performed that I can offer thee in return the hand of my fairest Fairy-queen ?”

Agag snapped a lance in twain, and thrusting its point in the ground, rested his hand upon its broken shaft while he recounted his deeds of valor.

“I have made such war upon the different tribes of

Elves that the longest of my lances has been filled to the hold with the heads of Elf-kings !

“I have left none but the best and bravest of Elves, and to enter under my banner and wear my shield of frog-skin is only accorded to some valiant yet conquered Elf-king !

“I, Agag, am the acknowledged king of all Elf-kings !”

“Agag, you have my permission to carry your war into the Fairies’ haunts ; but, you must leave your war-lances to rust in Elf-dom, and enter their grounds with only Cupid’s borrowed bow in hand, and his quiver of arrows at your back !

“Laugh-e-oo ! more ale !

“Back and side go bare, go bare,

Both foot and hand go col le ;

But, belly, I’ll send thee good ale enough,

Whether it be new or olde.”

Kreche, during this colloquy with Laugh-e-oo and Agag, had been busying herself making a cap of asbestos for Santa.

After fitting it closely to his head and taking a pinch here and there, she asked, “Santa, had you not better go to rest ?”

“ Well—yes—for—

‘ I am of ale so full within,

That more I cannot holde ;

And have no fear, that far or near,

I e’er can be a-colde.’

“ Call me at nine, that I may have an early start.

“ And, now, dear love, I go, and leave all things in your efficient hands.”

Saying which, he rose from his chair, while I saw that the crescent moons upon the corners and angles had now dimmed their lustre and were hardly noticeable ; and strolling toward a pile of handsome Turkish rugs, he threw one over his shoulder and soon entered the mouth of a shady cave, and, it is to be supposed, laid him down to sleep.

I now took to watching Kreche.

She, having regained her usual calmness and strength, carefully pinned up the skirt of her rich silk dress, not as a matter of economy, but from habitual neatness ; turned back the lace from her plump white wrists ; and proceeded to her work in a way which showed that she felt her capability to perform a feat, which, as I looked around upon the mountains of toys, seemed to me to be simply impossible.

She began by taking up the silver whistle which hung by her side and sounding a loud clear note.

Soon from out the forest of pine, and with their dark eyes glistening, came the bounding "eight tiny reindeer."

She made a motion with her head that they were to lie down.

All but "Vixen" dropped upon their sides, and with head and feet extended, lay motionless.

"Vixen" was inclined to speed back to the forest. She turned, and was about to show a set of light hoofs, when a shrill note from the whistle brought her to her senses. Halting, she stood for a moment and shook her antlered head, cast longing looks toward the shade of the pines, and then reluctantly laid down by her pair.

Kreche, once satisfied that "Vixen" would give her no more trouble, brought out the sleigh.

When I saw the moderate size of this renowned vehicle, I thought, Well, well; several thousand such would not begin to hold this huge mountain of toys! *What ever is she to do?* This last question showed my ignorance of Kreche's powers.

She first wiped and dusted it all over. This done,

she began covering the outside with hooks, some large, and some small.

Upon these were hung bags innumerable. And then came a packing and condensing of which I had never dreamed.

Such heaps, such rows, such acres of toys as disappeared within those bags would have astonished a Chinese Juggler. And strangest of all, they were never full! There was always room for whatever her hand might next rest upon.

All this was done in a careful, systematic manner, and, also, with quick deftness; and then I bethought me, Ah! well! she has had much experience. We cannot tell what two hundred years might not do for us!

After the filling of the bags came the packing of the sleigh itself. In this the most choice of the Christmas gifts were placed. The gold and silver; diamonds and pearls; deeds and bank notes; and those of their kind; after which, more bags were piled on top. And now I lost sight of the sleigh altogether.

The packing finished, Kreche stepped back and viewed her work. She seemed satisfied that matters

could not be improved ; placed her hand upon its edge to try its balance ; moved the packages a little to the right or left ; tried the strength of the traces ; and walking around it, gave an approving nod ; while I stood, self-confessed, that notwithstanding the great amount of freight which it contained, the sleigh, on the whole, looked as light as a feather.

Kreche now produced her work-basket. As one might know, it was ample.

Santa's fur coat was neatly reseamed ; next a patch put upon the toe of his boot ; she then added such other things as he would need during his long and cold ride ; and, finally, laid beside them a clean clay pipe and a pouch of sweet-scented tobacco.

Her eyes now sought the cuckoo clock, the hands of which were nearing the hour of Santa's departure.





SANTA LEAVING EL-FAY-GNO-LAND ON HIS CHRISTMAS JOURNEY.

Chap X.



CHAPTER X.

THE SLEEPERS AWAKE.

“Now I go, now I fly.

* * * * *

O ! what a dainty pleasure 'tis

To ride in the air

When the moon shines fair ;

And sing, and dance, and toy, and kiss !

Over woods, high rocks and mountains,

Over seas and mistress fountains,

Over steep towers and turrets

To fly by night.”

THE first to be roused from their sleep were the eight reindeer.

They sprang light and nimbly to their feet ; Vixen with a half-shamed light in her soft dark eyes as she remembered her truant ways. A double portion of meal was given them, as well as a hearty draught of fresh milk.

Having finished their supper, Kreche called them to her, giving to each one their own proper name as

she wanted them, and each one, in turn, held up his dainty little hoofs one after the other, until, with a tick-tick-tack, every silver shoe was fitted, sharply pointed, and fastened so firmly that no amount of straining, stamping, or pulling up steep roofs would loosen them.

She then adjusted their harness, trying every part to see if it were firm; put a string of sweet-sounding silver bells around each neck; led them in front of the sleigh; properly fastened the traces; and turning their heads toward the door, left them standing while she called Santa.

She disappeared for a moment down the shadowy aisles and in the cool cave, and soon returned accompanied by the Christmas hero.

He was quite as nimble in his step as were the little reindeer; shook himself, yawned, and shouted in a deep basso, "Laugh-e-oo! a boat of ale!"

While the ale was being brought, he sank easily into his chair, and motioned Kreche into hers.

Violette was soon by her side, bringing a cup of distilled honey-dew and a plate of sweet snow-cakes; while behind her might have been seen a charming circle of Wood-nymphs. (101)

Laugh-e-oo also came with a tankard of foamy ale, his calves still enormously bulging from sheer happiness, his ears tied back with the brightest of russet-green ribbons, so early had he taken on the color of his love, and each of his followers by their figure and garb indicated that the joy of their leader was also theirs.

Agag approached and drew his Elfin army into battle-line; the Fairy-queens, with their maids of honor in close attendance, formed rings of daintiness; the Water-sprites threw wreaths of delicate foam; the Mermaids in sea-green costume swung their bright mirrors, and arranged their beautiful tresses; the majestic procession of peacocks advanced; the white pink-eared rabbits sat patiently upon their haunches; bird and insectile life was on the wing, humming, flashing in joyous motion and song; the fountains sent up a rhythmical murmur; the roses, oleanders and waxen lilies shed their richest perfumes; the orange, lemon and bananas dropped their choicest fruits, and all came in a quiet, magical way, as did the music which accompanied Santa as he gayly sang—

“Come, my sweetheart, and take a parte,
Come, troll to me the bowle ;
And may I drinke, till you may thinke,
I cannot be a-colde.

For I must ride through valleys wide
And scale the mountains bolde ;
O'er ice and snow will gayly go,
Nor colde nor tire will bide.

Then come, sweetheart, and take your parte,
And join me in the bowle ;
Drinke to my ride and safe returne,
In jolly good ale and olde.

Though back and side go bare, go bare,
Nor foote nor hande shall be colde ;
For I'll fill my skin so full within
With this jolly good ale and olde.

Come one! come all! come at my call!
And each act well your parte ;
I'll leave in your care what to me is most dear,
My wife, my old sweetheart!”

So singing, he and Kreche both rose simultaneously from their chairs.

The little reindeer were impatiently waiting to be on their way.

“ Well, Kreche, wife, it is time for me to ride.”

She helped him off with his home clothes and on with his old fur coat, cap and mittens ; then filled and lighted his pipe, which, as he took it from her hand, glowed like a live ember.

Throwing his arm around her ample waist, he gave her a kiss that might have been heard around the world.

Nimbly mounting to a seat upon his securely packed sleigh, while Kreche threw open the wide doors, he adroitly gathered his handful of lines ; gave a crack to the whip, and shouted to his team, “ NOW, DASH AWAY ALL ! ”

Like the lightning’s flash they bounded forth, and in a twinkle were out of sight.

“ Santa Claus ”—“ Kriss Kringle ”—“ Saint Nicholas ”—was abroad !

I turned to see how Kreche bore Santa’s departure, half expecting to find her in tears.

Instead of Kreche, her attendants, the grottoes, hanging-gardens, dells and fountains, which I had thought to see, there stood the high, grey old rocks with the pines and hemlocks above them, and white with snow and ice ; the deep, deep, diaphanous organ

notes of the whirlwinds which were circling around their tops ; the gay ferns and sweet-scented vines and flowers at my feet ; and then, I knew that when the great door shut, it was between the hall and me, and I had nothing to do but to hie me home, sit down and tell the little boys and girls about my visit to SANTA CLAUS and his dear old wife, KRECHE KINDLY.



THE ENCHANTED LIBRARY

FOR YOUNG FOLKS.

VOLUMES JUST READY.

No 4. *A Visit to El-Fay-Gno-Land.*

By MRS. M. M. SANFORD. Illustrated . . 75c.

A story of a trip to the home of Santa Claus and Kreche Kindly in the land of Elves, Fairies, Gnomes, etc.

No. 3. *Kin-Folk.*

By JANET MILLER. Illustrated 75c.

A little girl's story of what the Birds, Bees, Butterflies, Flowers, Chickens, Kitty, the Calf, Old Watch and Dolly said to her in her play and rambles.

No. 2. *Harry Ascott Abroad.*

By MATTHEW WHITE, JR. 60c.

An American boy's travels abroad with descriptions of the beautiful places and novel sights that pleased him.

No. 1. *The Queer Little Wooden Captain.*

By SYDNEY DAYRE. Illustrated 90c.

Two Stories.—I. How the Little Wooden Captain came down from his time-honored place on top of a clock and had a merry Christmas frolic with the Tongs, Poker, Broom, etc. II. The Wanderings of a Little Lost Girl.

LINDA ; or ÜBER DAS MEER.

By MRS. H. L. CRAWFORD. Sq. 12mo., red edges. . . . \$1 25

Is larger than the "Enchanted Library" volumes, but is similar in character, being an account of a little girl's travels abroad, and the wonderful sights she saw.

NEW BOOKS AND NEW EDITIONS

JUST ISSUED BY

THE AUTHORS' PUBLISHING COMPANY,

27 Bond Street, New York.

MISCELLANEOUS.

- Analytical Processes; or, the Primary Principle of Philosophy.** Rev. WM. I. GILL, A. M.....\$2.00
- Beauty of the King.** Life of Christ. Rev. A. H. HOLLOWAY, A. M. \$1.00; gilt...\$1.25
- Camping in Colorado.** With Suggestions to Gold-Seekers, Tourists, and Invalids. S. A. GORDON.....\$1.00
- Christian Conception and Experience.** Rev. WM. I. GILL, A. M.....\$1.00
- Chronic Consumption, Prevention and Cure of.** DAVID MARK, M. D.....80c.
- Complete Scientific Grammar of the English Language.** Prof. W. COLEGROVE \$1.25
- Ecclesiology: Fundamental Idea and Constitution of the New-Testament Church.** E. J. FISH, D. D.....\$2.00
- Evolution and Progress.** An Exposition and Defence. Rev. WM. I. GILL....\$1.50
- How to be Beautiful.** LOUISE CAPSADELL.....25c.
- Is our Republic a Failure?** E. H. WATSON.....\$1.50
- Life Among the Clergy.** Rev. ROBERT FISHER.....\$1.25
- Life for a Look.** Rev. A. H. HOLLOWAY. 15c.
- Manuscript Paper.** Per ream, \$1.00 and \$1.25. By mail, 50c. per ream extra.
- Manuscript Manual.** How to Prepare Manuscripts for the Press.....10c.
- Mercantile Prices and Profits.** M. R. PILON. (*In Press.*)
- Race for Wealth.** JAMES CORLEY...50c.
- Resurrection of the Body.** Does the Bible Teach it? E. NISBET, D. D.....\$1.00
- Roman Catholicism in the United States.**.....\$1.25
- Scrap Books—How to Make Them.** E. W. GURLEY.....(*Shortly.*)
- Spiritual Communications from the Eternal World.** HENRY KIDDLE, A. M.. \$1.50
- Universe of Language.** Late GEO. WATSON. Edited by E. H. WATSON.....\$1.50
- What is Demonetization of Gold and Silver?** M. R. PILON.....75c.

FICTION AND ÆSTHETICS.

- Berrisford.** M. M. SANFORD.....(*Shortly.*)
- Buccaneers, The.** Historical Novel. RANDOLPH JONES.....Paper, \$1; cloth, \$1.50
- Deacon Crankey, the Old Sinner.** GEO. GUIREY.....\$1.50
- Cothurnus and Lyre.** E. J. HARDING.\$1.00
- Her Waiting Heart.** LOUISE CAPSADELL.....\$1.00
- In Dead Earnest.** J. BRECKINRIDGE. \$1.25
- Irene.** Mrs. B. F. BAER.....\$1.00
- Linda; or, Ueber das Meer.** Mrs. H. L. CRAWFORD. For Young Folks.....\$1.25
- Mystic Key.** A Poetic Fortune-Teller. 75c.
- Our Wedding Gifts.** AMANDA DOUGLAS.....\$1.00
- Shadowed Perils.** M. A. AVERY\$1.00
- Sumners' Poems.** S. B. and C. A. SUMNER. 12mo, \$2.50; 8vo, illustrated.\$4.00
- Hammock Stories.**.....\$1.25
- 'Twixt Wave and Sky.** F. E. WADLEIGH.....\$1.25
- Wild Flowers.** C. W. HUBNER.....\$1.00
- THE ENCHANTED LIBRARY.
(For Young Folks.)
- Queer Little Wooden Captain.** Illustrated. SYDNEY DAYRE.....90c.
- Harry Ascott Abroad.** M. WHITE, JR. 60c.
- Kin-Folk.** Illus. JANET MILLER. (*Shortly.*)
- A Visit to El-Fay-Guo-Land.** Mrs. SANFORD (*Shortly.*)

THE SATCHEL SERIES.

- Persis.** Tale for Tourists..... 25c.
- Vic.**..... 30c.
- Ninety-nine Days.**..... 35c.
- Spiders and Rice Pudding.**..... 25c.
- Glenmere.**..... 25c.
- Bera; or, C. & M. C. Railroad.**..... 40c.
- How it Ended.**..... 25c.
- Poor Theophilus.** Cloth, 60c..... 25c.
- Who Did It?**..... 30c.
- Only a Tramp.**..... 50c.
- Our Peggotties.**..... 25c.
- Our Winter Eden.**..... 30c.
- Nobody's Business.**..... 30c.
- Voice of a Shell.**..... 40c.
- Rosamond Howard.** Cloth, 60c..... 25c.
- Lily's Lover.**..... 35c.
- A Story of the Strike.**..... 30c.
- Bonny Eagle.**..... 25c.
- Prisons Without Walls.**..... 25c.
- The Traveler's Grab-Bag**..... 25c.
- Appeal to Moody.**..... 10c.

* * Books mailed, postpaid, to any part of the United States and Canada, upon receipt of price by the publishers.

New Plan of Publishing and Descriptive Catalogue mailed free.

P28

203

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00025768085